

## Deep South Training Tip



# "KIS" Training

When first asked to write an article on training, I wondered how I would condense 25 years of training into one article. Training has been a process of elimination over the years. I have studied with some of the top Quarter Horse and Paso Fino trainers. Some of their ideas I use, some I don't, some I've modified or expanded upon. I have finally settled into what I call the **KIS™** system or **Keep It Simple**.

To first start training a horse you must understand it. An old Calvary man that I knew always said "there are trainers and there are riders...the ultimate blend of these is a horseman". I have striven to be a horseman—somebody who can train, ride and understand horses. A horse learns in four ways:

- (1) herd hierarchy
- (2) visual
- (3) patterning and
- (4) release.

All of these are important, however, I will center this article on release and training in the round pen. Horses are naturally curious animals; however, their vision is not acute, and they have very little depth perception. When confronted with new stimuli, they study them through a series of advance and retreat moves. If the stimuli does not attack and the horse reaches a point where the object is "OK", he feels the point of release. When a colt is in a herd situation, the elder horses teach it proper behavior. If a colt acts inappropriately, the elder may discipline him by running him around. The elder horse will stop running the colt when the younger horse displays proper behavior, thus "releasing" the colt and in effect teaching him how to behave properly.

The round pen provides the trainer with a controlled environment in which you can establish yourself as the "elder" and alternately pressure or release the horse. In the round pen, you become the elder when in the mind of the trainee horse you are stronger, more agile and faster. You do not use the round pen to run your horse in circles. It is strictly a training tool. In the pen, you will teach the horse to steer both rear and front end and to yield pressure in both areas. If you swing your lariat and the horse swings his rear away, he is yielding in the hind end. You should then direct your focus to that shoulder, wave your rope and have the horse reverse to get the fore to yield. This will also teach the horse how to move it's feet and not stumble all over itself. At no time should the horse be hit with the lariat.

A horse has wide lateral vision and little depth perception. When in the pen, he is working in a large, round area (I prefer a 60' pen with enclosed sides). The horse is working in a large area and the trainer is using a small area enabling the trainer to keep up with the horse while using less effort. The trainer can use this to appear superior in his ability to outmaneuver the horse as long as the horse moves in a larger circle than the trainer. Even the rankest horse will come to realize that he cannot out run the trainer or "elder" and will realize that he has to deal with you. The elder horse can make the colt run, circle, stop and yield. This is how herd "pecking" order is established. You can use the same principles in the pen. A lunge line and whip may be used as long as you apply the dominant horse theory. The whip is to merely guide the horse.

To start, send the horse to the wall. I wave the lariat and my arm. Most pasos will head out on their own, others need a little encouragement. However, you do not want to assert aggressive behavior. I do not want to run and chase the horse. I want to remain walking in the center with my body pointed towards the horse's shoulder. If I raise my hand and cue the horse to stop, he should. If he does not, I push him back out to the wall and start again. If I cue him to stop, eventually he will stop and turn toward the center and me. He is asking "ok, what do you want me to do next". The horse should eventually become so sensitive that you are barely moving in the circle; he will turn upon command and stop when you do. He will come to you in the center to be rewarded. Talk to the horse and gently rub his face when he comes to you.

At first, this will be foreign to the new trainer or owner. I recommend watching a professional round pen a horse to get the full impact of the procedure prior to trying yourself. In ground work and in riding, be precise in your *intention* of what you *want* the horse to do

and your *message*—what you actually *ask* the horse to do. Do not get upset if you make mistakes! The difference between the amateur and the pro is that the amateur will quit on a bad note, or worse, punish the horse. The pro goes with the mistake and supports the horse in a new direction. Thus the horse does not realize that it made a mistake. If you make a mistake, analyze what happened, learn from the mistake and try it again. You are not letting the horse disobey or refuse you; you are clarifying your communication skills. Later, when you are proficient in your cues and the horse is really trying to avoid doing as you ask, you can address the discipline problem. The exception to this is safety issues and horses who intentionally "try" you. If you want your horse to remain responsive to your cues and aids, often the handler (you) will have to touch things up. This is how *you* learn. As you go through life with your horse, you will have people and trainers give you advice. Always do what makes sense to you in your situation. Weed out what doesn't work and make use of what does work. Always continue to learn and **Keep It Simple**.

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